

Proseminar Questions

Week 1.

Frege, "On Sense and Reference"

How does Frege use identity sentences to argue that proper names have both a sense and a reference? How does Frege understand the sense of a proper name? How is it distinguished from an idea associated with the name? How does Frege argue that sentences, not just proper names, have both a sense and reference? How does he support his claim that the reference of a sentence is its truth value? After presenting his main views, why does Frege then go on to spend more than half of the article discussing subordinate clauses? Why does Frege think that the reference of a proper name shifts when it occurs, for example, in indirect quotation? How does it shift?

Frege, "The Thought"

Why does Frege reject the correspondence theory of truth? Why does he think that truth is indefinable? How does Frege characterize the notion of a thought? How does considering different kinds of sentence help clarify the notion? Explain what Frege means by "the contents of a sentence often go beyond the thoughts expressed by it." Explain what he means by "the mere wording [of a sentence] ... does not suffice for the expression of the thought." How does the case of the wounded Dr. Gustav Lauben bear on these issues? What are the three realms, and how does Frege argue that thoughts belong to the third realm? How does Frege respond to an idealist who claims that only my ideas can be the object of my awareness? How does Frege respond to an empiricist who claims that thoughts are unreal because they "neither undergo effects nor have effect on us?"

Week 2.

Russell, "On Denoting"

Present Russell's theory of (definite) descriptions. How does Russell's way of giving truth conditions for sentences involving 'the' differ from how it would standardly be done today in 1st order predicate logic? Explain how Russell's account satisfies his claim that "denoting phrases never have a meaning in themselves, but every proposition in which they occur has a meaning." Why does Russell reject Meinong's account? Russell rejects Frege's account, claiming that "the whole distinction between meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived." What does Russell mean by this? (This will take you into the famous "Gray's elegy" argument that is notoriously difficult to understand. You may find the following handout helpful: https://www3.nd.edu/~jspeaks/courses/2007-8/43904/_HANDOUTS/grays-elegy.pdf) What three puzzles does Russell think that his account can solve? Does Russell's account solve these problems, and if so how?

Strawson, "On Referring"

What are Strawson's objections to Russell's treatment of 'the king of France is bald'? How does he think we should deal with sentences such as this? Strawson is adamant about the importance of the context of utterance of a sentence, something Russell does not discuss. Could Russell's theory be amended to take Strawson's observations into account? If so, would any of Strawson's worries have any force?

Week 3

Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Lectures 1 and 2).

What are rigid designators? Why does Kripke think that proper names are rigid designators? (Are proper names the only rigid designators?) (2) What is wrong, according to Kripke, with the arguments on p. 38 to the conclusion that a truth is necessary if and only if it is knowable *a priori*? What are Kripke's example of the necessary *a posteriori* and the contingent *a priori*? Are they successful? (3) According to Kripke, "if you give up the idea that this is a theory of meaning and make it into a theory of reference in the way that I have described, you give up some of the advantages of the theory" (p. 59). Explain the distinction Kripke is drawing between a "theory of meaning" a "theory of reference" for proper names. What are the advantages you give up if you take the description theory (the theory characterized by the six theses at the beginning of Lecture II) as a theory of reference? Why does he think it is false as a theory of meaning? Why does he think it is false even as a theory of reference? Is he right? (4) Are there true, contingent identity statements? Are there true, contingent identity statements involving no referring expressions other than proper names? Could there be things *x* and *y* that bear the identity relation to one another but only contingently so? How, if at all, does the answer to each of these questions constrain the answer to the others?

Week 4

Lewis, "Index, Context, and Content"

How do contexts and indices figure in to the determination of an utterance's truth value? Present and illustrate Lewis's argument that a semantics for natural language needs both context-dependence and index-dependence. Why does Lewis reject the "schmentencite" response? Why does Lewis reject Stalnaker's and Kaplan's reasons for favoring "variable but simple semantic values"?

Stalnaker, "Assertion"

Present and illustrate Stalnaker's notion of a propositional concept. How does Stalnaker use propositional concepts to explicate Kripke's distinction between metaphysical necessity and a prioricity? Explain Stalnaker's notion of the speaker presupposition, and how it gets

incorporated into the context. How does the content of an assertion typically alter the context? Are there exceptions? What are the three principles that Stalnaker proposes, and how would he justify them?

Week 5

Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"

(1) Strawson says (p. 338) that expressions that can be used to refer can differ from each other in three ways: 1) in the degree to which reference is determined by the context of the utterance; 2) in the degree of descriptive meaning they possess; and 3) whether their correct referring use is regulated by general or *ad hoc* conventions. Consider now Donnellan's "referential use" of a definite description. How would this be classified on Strawson's scheme? (2) Donnellan writes: "Both the attributive and the referential use of definite descriptions seem to carry a presupposition or implication that there is something that fits the description. But the reasons for the existence of the presupposition or implication are different in the two cases." Explain.

Kripke, "Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference"

(1) Kripke says that his conclusions about Donnellan's criticism of Russell will be "methodological, not substantive." Explain, using one or two of Kripke's arguments as an illustration. (2) How does Kripke propose to treat the phenomena that Donnellan is trying to capture with his distinction between referential and attributive definitions? Why does Kripke think his approach does better than Donnellan's?

Week 6

Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Chapter 1, "The Elimination of Metaphysics"

(1) In explicating the criterion of verifiability, Ayer makes two distinctions: a distinction between verifiability in principle and verifiability in practice, and a distinction between strong and weak notions of verifiability. Explain these distinctions and why they are important. Do you think it is always clear how these distinctions apply? Consider cases. (2) Consider Ayer's formulation of the criterion on pp. 38-9. Ayer admits in a footnote that this is too simple. Without looking up the introduction where he tries to do better, can you think of a quick counterexample that shows that, on the stated criterion, any proposition whatsoever comes out as genuinely factual? (3) A familiar critique of Ayer's criterion is that when it is applied to itself, it seems not to be factual or analytic, and should therefore be eliminated along with other metaphysics. How do you think Ayer could or should respond? (Hempel's paper has things to say about the last two questions. You may want to try to answer them prior to reading his paper.)

Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Chapter 4, "The *A Priori*"

(1) Why does mathematics present a problem for Ayer's empiricism? What are the two possible responses? (2) What is Mill's view of mathematics, and why does Ayer reject it? (3) How does Ayer understand the notion of analyticity? How does it compare with Kant's notion of analyticity, or Frege's notion according to which a proposition is analytic if it can be derived from general truths of logic and definitions? (4) Consider Ayer's particular examples and explain how they are supposed to come out analytic on Ayer's notion of analyticity. For example, consider "Nothing can be colored in different ways at the same time with respect to the same part of itself", or " $5+7=12$ ", or "the angles of a triangle sum to 180 degrees".

Hempel, "Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning"

(1) What are the three objections Hempel gives to using conclusive verifiability or conclusive falsifiability as a criterion of cognitive significance. (2) Why does Hempel think that requiring translation into a language whose non-logical vocabulary contains only observation predicates is too narrow? How does he suggest this problem be solved? (3) Hempel claims that one cannot take the meaning of a cognitively significant proposition to be the observation sentences that it entails. Explain why? How should we think about the meaning of statements in science? Might there be a confusion here between semantic and epistemic issues? (4) How does Hempel suggest we understand the criterion of cognitive significance that makes it neither empirically significant nor analytic?